

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 5NEW YORK DAILY NEWS  
1 March 1987

FILE ONLY

## CHANGING OF THE GUARD

# Ron's CIA shocker

## Offered job to chief of North's legal firm

By HARRISON RAINIE

News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—President Reagan offered the job of CIA director to famed criminal attorney Edward Bennett Williams in January—a move that has shocked some observers as an attempted “political payoff.”

Williams' law firm represents Oliver North, the central figure in the Iran-Contra scandal, whose testimony could potentially ruin the administration. Williams turned down the job, citing health reasons, according to reliable Senate sources.

The disclosure about Williams comes at the same time that there is mounting suspicion Reagan will withdraw the nomination of Robert Gates as CIA director. It is increasingly unlikely that Gates will be confirmed by the Senate in the wake of strong criticism of his performance as deputy CIA director during the administration's covert actions in the IranCon scandal.

### Nixon parallel?

Several sources have drawn a parallel between the offer made to Williams and the controversial offer to run the FBI that President Richard Nixon made in 1973 to Judge Matthew Byrne when he was presiding over a Watergate-related criminal case—an offer damned in many quarters as a kind of political bribe attempt. (Byrne eventually spurned the offer and went public with the story.)

“It certainly gives the appearance that Williams was being offered a political payoff,” said one angry Senate Democrat.

A partner in Williams' firm, Brendan Sullivan, is North's lead attorney. Sullivan has mounted a vigorous defense by trying to block investigators' attempts to get North to testify without immunity and to get access to key documents and bank accounts that will show what happened to tens of millions of dollars North controlled in the Iran arms sales and the private effort to help the Contras in Nicaragua.

### Effort to block probe

Sullivan also filed suit in Federal District Court here last week trying to end the Iran-Contra investigation by special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh and Sullivan has moved to block Justice Department access to secret Swiss bank accounts controlled by North and his cronies.

North, like John Dean in

Watergate, is the central figure in this scandal, and his testimony about who gave authorization for his efforts and who knew what he was doing is the most important missing information.

It is conceivable that he is the only person besides Reagan himself who knows exactly what the President knew about North's secret efforts to help provide military supplies to the Contras during the two-year period when the administration was barred by law from giving lethal military aid to the rebels.

### Won't return calls

Neither Williams nor Sullivan would return phone calls from the Daily News in the past two weeks to determine how they reacted to the White House offer that Williams take charge of American intelligence gathering.

Williams is a prominent Democrat who became a legend for winning criminal defenses of mobsters and Jimmy Hoffa. He has been a member of the Intelligence Oversight Board, a civilian group of advisers to the intelligence community that was sharply criticized by last week's Tower Commission report for providing poor advice to North and other officials about the legality of administration's efforts in aiding the covert war against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

It could not be learned if Williams himself provided the legal advice, but there was a strong feeling in the administration that the Boland Amendment restrictions on U.S. covert war-making in Central America were unconstitutional.